

PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON HEALTH EDUCATION

In his 1971 Health Message to Congress, President Nixon said, "We have given remarkably little attention to the health education of our people. Most of our current efforts in this area are fragmented and haphazard. There is no national instrument, no central force to stimulate and coordinate a comprehensive health education program."

A major step toward a comprehensive program was the appointment of the President's Committee on Health Education. The Committee issued its report in September 1973. Among the Committee's findings:

—Less than half of 1 percent of the \$75 billion spent on health care in 1972 was spent on health education. State health departments spend less than half of 1 percent of their budgets on health education.

—The quality of much health information material is questionable, untested, and outdated. Health education in schools is not effective, even when it is attempted. The lack of health education as a means of maintaining health is especially acute among the poor.

The Committee collected data from more than 2,000 individual persons, organizations, and agencies and found little or no coordination of effort or evaluation of existing health education programs in or out of government.

The panel recommended the creation of a private, nonprofit National Center for Health Education "to stimulate, coordinate, and evaluate health education programs." Such a center would, in effect, continue the work of the Committee by determining in further detail the state of the art in health education, by esti-

imating the present degree of success in health education efforts, and by recommending additional health education activities that carry a high promise of success. The Committee also recommended:

—That the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare work with all Federal agencies to make the most of the Federal Government's involvement in health education.

—That government prepayment plans and insurance companies, as well as other health plans, adjust health care premiums to cover the cost of health education for patients.

—That employers, including the Federal Government, build health education into existing programs for employees.

When the report was issued September 25, 1973, President Nixon told Committee members that "this is not to be a document to collect dust. I want an action plan in 90 days." Dr. Charles C. Edwards, Assistant Secretary for Health, has been asked by Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Caspar W. Weinberger to develop the implementation plan.

"We are very much committed to the whole concept of health education," Dr. Edwards stated. According to Dr. Edwards, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare right now is spending a great deal of money in health education. "We don't really know how much," he said, "but we are certainly convinced that we are not getting the maximum utilization out of the dollars." Over the next 3 months, he noted, the Department will be developing a plan and exploring ways to implement it.

Cover: Child development is one of many health and health-related services provided by both public and private agencies under the umbrella of the Mon Valley system. See article beginning on page 844.

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